

Indian Child Life



Women's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church
156 Fifth Avenue, New York

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MY DEAR LITTLE FRIENDS :

So many children have said to me, "Tell us about the Indian boys and girls," that I am going to write you a letter about these people who in some ways are quite unlike you.

To begin with, the Indian child is very shy; so shy indeed that I had been among the Indians for some weeks, and had become a welcome visitor in many homes, before I managed to get near enough to a little Indian to see what he looked like. I remember



how surprised I was when I found that Sarah Scott had children. I had been to see Sarah a number of times, but the little hut was always quiet, and Sarah never seemed disturbed or nervous as our mothers sometimes are when company arrives too suddenly.

One afternoon I had been down by the river calling upon some Indians, when I decided I would follow the river a short distance and call upon Sarah. I did not usually go to Sarah's house this way, as it was a long way around, but the day was so warm that I wanted to keep near the water as long as possible. As I approached the hut I thought I just caught a glimpse of little bare feet disappearing in the underbrush, but when I reached the door all was so

quiet that I decided I must have been mistaken. Sarah was at home sitting upon the floor, weaving a basket. When we go to see the Indians they never ask us to be seated, but we know they do not mean to be impolite, so we hunt up an old box, turn it on edge and balance ourselves while we talk. This day I looked for a box, but could not find one. The only furniture in the room was the bed. I did not quite like to sit on it, as it had not been made that day. Finally I seated myself very carefully upon its edge. Did I say *seated*? I made a mistake; I had not fairly touched that bed when the most piercing shrieks rent the air! I jumped up and looked at Sarah. Sarah might have been carved in stone, so indifferent was



she, while the walls of her hut bade fair to tumble about her. "Sarah, what *is* the matter?" I asked, in great distress. Sarah shrugged her shoulders and murmured: "Dey 'fraid." "Who is afraid?" I asked. "Ma papoose." "Your papoose; you have no children." "We get t'ree; dey unner bed; dey 'fraid; me tink you bet go now." I thought so, too, and decided to follow Sarah's advice.

It is hard to win the friendship of a little Indian, but when you have once won him he remains your friend forever. Only once have I found that this was not true, and then it was because of a sad mistake on my part. About a week after little Leo had begun to be friendly with me, some one sent me one of those little rubber pigs that you blow up and then watch die while their squeak grows fainter and more faint.

One afternoon I went calling and took the pig with me. The old Indians liked it as well as did the children. They would roll over and over in the dirt, in their delight, and beg me to "do it again." Finally I reached Leo's house. The door was open and a number of old Indians were stretched out on the porch. They told me Leo's mother was not at home. I supposed Leo was with her—the children nearly always go with the mother—and was sorry to miss my little friend.

I blew up the pig, but the chuckles of the old people could not be heard because of a wild howl that came from the house. Leo had been peeking through a crack in the door and the pig frightened him. Often after that unlucky day I would be startled by a howl ;



sometimes as I stepped from my canoe to draw it up on the sand, sometimes while walking along the road, I would be frightened by a loud howl. But I never again saw Leo. He saw me and that was enough.

You know with white children the people who pay the most attention to them, who talk with them and show them pictures, are the people they like the most. It is just the opposite with the Indian child. I used to call upon Rachael's mother quite often. Always I would find Rachael on the floor behind her mother. I never noticed the child in any way, but upon leaving, I would give the mother a picture card and tell her to give it to her little girl. One day, after I had called many times, the little girl came from behind her mother's back and placed a bunch of flowers in my lap. After that we grew to be very good friends.

The Indian child respects his elders. He is taught to obey almost from babyhood. He would no more think of refusing to do his parents' bidding, or of even asking why he must do thus and so, than he would think of going without eating.

There are never loud tones in an Indian home, never quarrelsome voices. In winter, when the doors are closed, all is so quiet that the only way of finding whether the family is at home is by the smoke issuing from the stove-pipe.

There are seldom more than three or four children in an Indian family. As you enter a hut, the children will probably be playing together in a corner. If it is your first visit, they will run and hide. If you have been there often, and they have learned that you will not try to touch them, they will go on with their game. But if they have decided to be friendly they will sit at your feet and look up into your face while you talk. But it matters little whether they hide, or play, or listen to you, the lowest tone from the parent—a tone that you could hardly hear—will bring them to their feet



instantly, and before you realize that an order has been given, the children will silently leave the hut and as silently return, with an armful of wood, a bucket of water, or a basket of acorns, as the case may be. I wish that our white children might cultivate this habit of instant obedience, and of reverence for parents and grandparents.

Indian parents do not whip their children ; they consider it disgraceful to have to do such a thing. An Indian said to me : “ I not whip my boy, I *’shamed*. I want my boy go school, I say, ‘ You go school.’ He go. My boy mind me ; my boy not mind me, that make me *’shamed*. ”

The Indian child is a lover of nature. While you white children are studying books the Indian child is studying the clouds, the trees, the insects and the river currents. He loves to wander through the woods, to lie down under a tree and dream, or sit on the river banks

and watch the current. He knows every weather signal; he is familiar with every bush and tree; he knows the wild lilac, "that make good Injun soap that wash poison oak away." He knows the madrone, "that make good hot fire," the witch hazel, "that good medicine," the hazel nut, "that make good basket," and so on of everything that grows.

The Indian child loves flowers. Every Indian has a bunch of flowers in his hut, as long as there is a flower to be gathered. The little tots know just when and where to look for certain flowers, and they never make a mistake.

Most of us think that Indian children are cruel. Let me tell you a secret: I have seen white boys pull the legs and wings off of flies. I have seen them hang a kitten to a clothes-line and tie tin cans to dogs' tails, but I never saw an Indian boy do any of these things. An Indian boy takes his sling, or his bow and arrow and goes hunting, but he never kills more than he needs. When he is hunting quail, he does not come back with a chipmunk, a squirrel, a bluejay, a woodpecker, and a rabbit in his bag.

The Indian child is very brave. He will endure any amount of pain and suffering without a murmur. Once I saw some Indian children vaccinated. Did they have to be held while the doctor scratched their arms? No indeed! They stood in line with their arms bared awaiting their turn; and when it came they marched up to the doctor and held out the arm as much as to say, "I'd like to see you make *me* cry." The children seem to glory in deeds of bravery. Little Mary met with a terrible accident: her hair was caught in some moving machinery, and she was scalped as completely as if an Indian had done it.

The doctor decided to graft skin upon Mary's head and asked the child's friends to volunteer portions of their skin. The little primary girls were among the first to offer patches of skin from their arms. There was so much grafting to be done that it took some weeks. Yet the children remembered their appointments



and were always at the doctor's office at the right time. One day, as I passed the hospital, a little girl came running out, crying as if her heart would break. I thought that she had been hurt more than she had anticipated and began to comfort her. When she saw what I thought she was quite cross, and would have nothing to do with me. Then the doctor told me that when Lulu went to the hospital, Mary was feeling cross and said she "guessed she wouldn't have any of Lulu's old skin on her head." Mary was too sick to be argued with, so the doctor sent Lulu away without taking a piece of her skin! Was Mary grateful to those who had suffered that her head might have a skin upon it? No indeed! Mary thought that they were honored.

Many Indian women have ugly black marks upon their chins. Some have only one line, while others have the chin completely covered. These marks are put on the girls when they are quite small and remain with them through life. The chin is pricked with a bit of broken glass and a dark liquid poured into the bleeding wound. This is continued, line after line, until the little girl cries, then it is stopped. So those women who have their chins completely covered were the bravest little girls. The Indians do not do this now, but it shows how much they think of bravery.

An Indian child will listen to reason. He loves to argue, but he will listen to your side of the story without interrupting, and when you have finished he will give his. If he see that you have the best of the argument, he is not ashamed to tell you so.

Little Ray used very bad language ; sometimes when he was angry he would swear. He had been spoken to about his bad habit many times, and finally he was told that if he used such language again he would be punished. I think Ray tried to overcome his habit, but you know when a habit is once formed it is very hard to get rid of.

One day Ray got very angry and forgot all his good



resolutions. The teacher, true to her promise, punished him. I think she felt as badly as did Ray. Ray's little friends looked very sad and kept saying: "Miss —— had to punish Ray."

The teacher explained to Ray that she had not punished him because she was angry with him, but to help him to remember not to use such bad words. Then she said: "If I were a little boy and used bad words and did naughty things, and no one asked me to stop, or told me how bad it was, I would go on doing these things until I became a man and when I died I would be so bad that I could not go to heaven. I would a great deal rather some one would punish me when I was little and so help me to remember; then I would keep trying to be good until I died and when I died I could go to be with Jesus." Little Ray looked up into the teacher's face and said: "I would, too!"

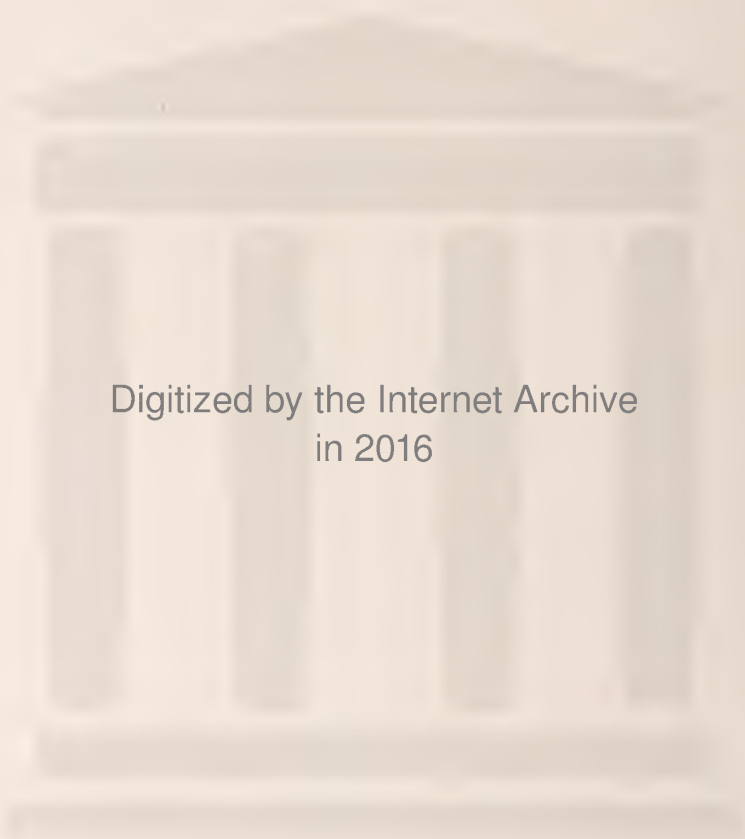
Do you not think an Indian boy with such a fine spirit is worth helping? You may all have a hand in helping them if you will. You need not wait until you are men and women; you may help while you are yet boys and girls. How would you like to send one of these children to school? There are many who would be glad to go if some one would pay their way. Ask the older people about it and they will tell you how you may be of help to these little ones while you are yet children.

Cordially yours,

NELLIE TICHENOR MCGRAW.



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